



Quiddities

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Frozen Warnings, 2005

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Apologia

Ezra Pound famously remarked that when poetry strays too far from music, it ceases to be poetry. I would like to opine, as a tangent thought to his, that when the higher arts stray too far from philosophy, they cease to be the higher arts. Philosophy, no less than literature, is a series of narratives; and that higher-end, intellectually ambitious literature should twirl and torque meaningfully around philosophical quandaries and discourses is something that English-language poetry has forgotten in the last half-century (and I mean “pure” philosophy, as differentiated from literary theory or aesthetics). The leveling process by which no distinctions between high and low art are made, as a precondition to post-modernity’s preponderance, has effaced interest in the “fundamental questions” in favor of narrow, nihilistic ironies and corrosive but intellectually superficial cultural critiques. But that, without reprising Romanticism, English language poetry can reclaim interest in pure philosophy and the crux questions of human existence, is the assumption these poems make. As such, they are angled against everything in the English language oeuvre after T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, including the array of Deconstructive, non-narrative poetics, which confuse the respective (though not completely antithetical) functions of philosophy and poetry in an excessive and demeaning alienation of the aesthetic.

How my approach differs from Eliot’s is this— rather than compressing the sensory data relevant to his inquiry into succinct forms, he prefers to paint on a wide canvas. The sharp points of his piece, often expressed in axioms and aphorisms, suffer a dissipated sense of being too generalized; an intermittent chiasmus with the tactile is represented, but focus is all too often lost in digression and imprecisely motivated meanderings. Many of Eliot’s axioms are, in fact, quotations (from, among others, Heraclitus and St. John of the Cross); and his Modernistic allusiveness chips away at the potential philosopher’s stone of original cognition for him. The poems in *Quiddities* are compressed and formed in the manner of John Keats’ *Odes*; not, of course, that the poems are odes, just that they are meant to convey mystery-in-brevity; and a sense, however sodden with disillusionment and despair, of enchantment. For enchantment in intellectual mystery, where English language verse is concerned, few poems but these *Apparition Poems* after the English Romantics will suffice. Modernism and post-modernism presented many shortcuts to a sense of engaged cognition; but the full enchantment of the depths and mysteries of the human mind and its powers of perception and discernment was not perceived or represented. Impulses which could have led to these representations were deemed too earnest, in a milieu and context which prized irony, and mistrust of any form of depth, especially subjectively maintained cognitive-affective depth, with or against impulses which could be deemed Romantic.

If *Quiddities* is not merely a reprise of Romantic impulses, it is because the mysteries the poems encompass and close on are not comforting. Wordsworth’s conception of intellectual enchantment is positivist; he follows a pedagogical path to teach us, with a discrete, didactic, and circumscribed system, how to think. This is the thematic backbone of *The Prelude*, his masterpiece. Intellectual man, he informs us, can always fall back on Nature; and Nature has the capacity to endlessly replenish intellectual man. The other major Romantics offer more naïve versions of the same intermittently comforting premise; even if Byron and Keats have ways of building levels of permanent encroaching darkness into their visions, too. The intellectual enchantment in *Quiddities* ends in itself; the poems offer no system as a transcendental antidote, and nothing is endlessly

replenishing in the poems except the endless montage of thought (thoughts on more thoughts). The enchantment offered by Quiddities is strange and (in a contradictory way) bitter; cognition has no recourse but to recur endlessly, in a sensory landscape as blasted and dystopic as the poems themselves. To circle back to Eliot again, where Quiddities is concerned; it is cognition over the (or a) waste land. But that the human intellect can and should develop its own kind of narcissism, over the dictatorial narcissism of the senses, especially in America, is presupposed. The human mind is the only enchanted place with any genuine permanence for mankind; that is the key and primordial supposition here.

Adam Fieled, 2013

#1345

Two hedgerows with a little path
between— to walk in the path like
some do, as if no other viable route
exists, to make Gods of hedgerows
that make your life tiny, is a sin of
some significance in a world where
hedgerows can be approached from
any side— I said this to a man who
bore seeds to an open space, and he
nodded to someone else and whistled
an old waltz to himself in annoyance.

#1613

Follow Abraham up the hill:
to the extent that the hill is
constituted already by kinds
of knives, to what extent can
a man go up a hill, shepherd
a son to be sacrificed, to be
worthy before an almighty
power that may or may not
have had conscious intentions

where hills, knives, sons were
concerned, but how, as I watch
this, can I not feel that Abraham,
by braving knives, does not need
the one he holds in his rapt hands?

#1617

Philosophy says that poets want to lose.
What are conditions of losing: to whom?
The conditions (to whom they concern, to

unrepresented phantoms, mostly) are colors,
which, to transcribe, require a solid core of
nebulous necromancy which philosophy calls

(for its own poetic reasons) "loss." I took this
from one strictly (which necessitated looseness
towards me) for himself, took several median

blended colors and painted a razor on the roof
of a red building. Then I fell off. But I lived.

#1622

Poor Schopenhauer's axioms:
all in the will is a fight to beat
other wills. I see him in his
meager room, his will bent
not to do much, save himself
the trouble of fighting these
ineluctable battles, but not
able to refrain from eating,
breathing, shitting, fucking,
all those simple acts that are
will-to-survival, but Arthur
casts himself into a future of
power, not knowing when it
arrived it was to be a crass joke,
ended with face in turtle soup.

#1625

The "I" that writes cannot be
(he told us, perched on a hill of
flowers which he crushed, but, of
course, incompletely, and not all of
them at once) strictly for-itself as it
has no substance: a student walked

up, pricked his forearm (the back side
of it) with a small razor, he cringed but
only briefly, leaning forward so that a
row of buttercups doused him yellow.
The "I" that writes has a relationship
that is very much for itself, but it has

a strictly independent existence, so that
what constitutes a human "I" has no
meaning for it. Now, you need to know
this: I was not the student with the razor,
but I supplied the razor to the student
that cut the professor's forearm, but you

will never know how I got it, or why.

#1645

The father's gaze (depending which gaze you happen to be referring to) is panoptic. It goes in without leaving traces. So if you have several fathers that leave no traces, &

merely invisible gazes, there is or maybe a sense in which you have no fathers. I saw all this happening to me, along with every thing else, many years ago, before I could

visualize the cell I was in, before I knew how the walls stank of fresh paint, or saw that I was getting smeared at any juncture. But, as I saw this, my father who was my

father turned, spoke down to me in such a way that I listened. I took what he said, gazed at my cell, and watched the paint dry deep into the night before I busted out to

watch the dawn break over the Delaware.

#1476

Days follow days off cliffs—
do these things we do have
any resonance, do they rise
into the ether, or are they to
be ground down into pulp,
briefly making earth sodden,
then dissipated dust scattered
over plains too vast, blasted
with winds, rains, storms, to
be counted or harvested?

#1480

How horrendous, to realize there are people in the world with no soul, walking zeros, hollow spaces, dead end interiors, permanently frozen faculties, how horrendous to watch how they borrow words of others to sound profound, but each echo reveals there's nothing behind it but the kind of charred silence that comes after a corpse is burnt— how horrendous, how it makes some of us cling to what we feel, how we feel, that we feel, and that everything we feel is so precious, specifically (and only) because it is felt, and stays felt.

#1281

You can take for granted
lots of God-awful garbage
in places deemed important
by fools; this goes for every
thing, including poetry. Why?
Because the world runs (has,
will always) on mediocrity, so
safe, so comforting, like a mug
of hot cocoa on a winter's night,
or a mediocre simile, people want
others to be mediocre, to be fools,
that's just the way things go, people
are nothing to write home about, or
(if you are writing to God) nothing to
write about at all, the world is no mystery,
all the mystery is in the night sky, looking up.

#1241

Why does no one tell the truth?
Because the truth is (more often
than not) absurd. No one wants
to look absurd, so no one tells
the truth, which creates even
more absurdity; worlds grow
into self-parody, systems grow
down into gutters, whole epochs
are wasted in perfidy; Cassandra
finally opens her mouth, no one
listens, they want her to star in
a porno, set her up with a stage-
name, she learns not to rant,
visions cloud her eyes, cunt—

#1168

The essential philosophical question
is incredibly stupid—
why is it that things happen? You can
ask a thousand times,
it won't matter— nothing does, except
these things that
keep happening, “around” philosophy.

#1067

I want to last—
to be the last
of the last of
the last to be

taken by time,
but the thing
about time is
that it wants,

what it wants
is us, all of us
wane quickly
for all time's

ways, sans "I,"
what I wants—

Credits

Artrecess2— 1625

Great Works (UK)— 1067

Jacket Magazine— 1345, 1476, 1480

PFS Post— 1613, 1645

Stoning the Devil— 1168, 1241

(all poems in this collection are drawn from the Blazevox '10 book Apparition Poems)

